

# INTRODUCTORY LECTURE

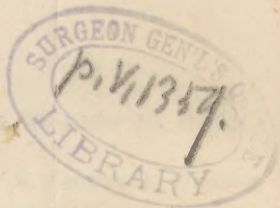
TO THE COURSE OF

## MATERIA MEDICA,

DELIVERED IN THE

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA,

NOVEMBER 6, 1837.



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PHILADELPHIA:

J. G. AUNER, 331 MARKET STREET.

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PRINTED BY L. R. BAILEY, 26 NORTH FIFTH STREET.

1837.

TO THE EDITOR OF

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1887

## CORRESPONDENCE.

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*University of Pennsylvania, November 13, 1837.*

PROFESSOR GEORGE B. WOOD,

SIR.—At a Meeting of the Medical Class of the University of Pennsylvania, held this day, it was unanimously resolved, that a copy of your very excellent and eloquent Introductory Address be requested for publication.

As a Committee appointed for that purpose, permit us to entertain the hope that you will not be unwilling to comply with their solicitations.

With great respect and esteem, we are your's, &c.,

FRANCIS B. CARTER,  
PHILIP A. SCHUYLER,  
GEORGE G. NOLAND,  
JOHN E. TUCKER,  
JOHN A. GUION.

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*Philadelphia, November 17, 1837.*

TO MESSRS. FRANCIS B. CARTER, PHILIP A. SCHUYLER, GEORGE G. NOLAND, JOHN E. TUCKER, and JOHN A. GUION:

GENTLEMEN.—Valuing as I do the favourable opinion of the Medical Class, I cannot but feel highly gratified by the evidence of it afforded in the request which you have presented to me on their part. The Address is entirely at their disposal. I only wish that its merits were more nearly equal to their partial estimate. Convey to the Class the assurance of my affectionate interest, and believe me to be

Your sincere friend,

GEORGE B. WOOD.





## INTRODUCTORY LECTURE.

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GENTLEMEN—

I SHOULD be doing injustice to my feelings, were I to enter at once upon the business for which we are met together, without a kindly greeting to the many old friends whom I recognise among you, and a hearty welcome to those yet unknown to me, whom I hope to see no less my friends before we part. I can never consider the relation which is to subsist between us as one of mere sordid interest. You come to receive instruction in an art which is to form the main business of your lives. We, who are to communicate this instruction, will therefore be associated, favourably or unfavourably, as the case may be, with your whole course of future thought. I, for one, cannot be indifferent to the character of this association. I cannot consent that unkind or disrespectful impressions of our intercourse should find a permanent place in your recollections. With such sentiments, how could I meet you with indifference? How could I hold out a finger to your grasp, and turn coldly to my allotted task? No, gentlemen—I offer you frankly my whole hand; I welcome you cordially to our joint labours; and I can assure you, that the hope of your sympathy and co-operation renders cheering to me the prospect of duties which might otherwise be irksome.

You are about to enter on a toilsome pursuit, and have applied to our greater experience for aid and counsel. These it is our duty to afford you; and it becomes us to consider in what way they may be imparted most effectually for your good. It is not sufficient to lay before you the bare materials of know-

ledge, to be connected and fashioned as your own taste and judgment may dictate. Nature, whether moral or physical, seldom presents her elements in an isolated state. She variously combines them, arranges the results of her grand chemistry in numberless shapes of use or ornament, invests each individual existence with infinitely diversified relations, and, by an invisible cord of union, binds all her vast materials, however apparently discordant, in one great and harmonious whole. Science is nothing more than the interpreter of nature. Each department of knowledge or of art is but one of the groups of her boundless dominion. Instruction, to be perfect, must be a copy of her works. The branches of study which are to engage your attention are all shoots of the same great trunk, and obedient to the same laws. In our endeavours, therefore, to teach you, we should aim always at an approach to nature. We should present you with the elements of knowledge; but we should also make you familiar, so far as our own shortsightedness can penetrate, with all their combinations and relations having any bearing upon your pursuit. Such is the principle which will guide me in teaching *Materia Medica*. My intention is not only to introduce to your notice individual medicines; but also to treat of them in all their bearings—to give you a sketch at least of all those various courses of action and opinion in which they constitute essential objects. With these intentions, I cannot pass over unnoticed the abuses to which medicines are liable.

It is the tendency of addiction to any one pursuit, to magnify its advantages, and, in an equal degree, to underrate its attendant evils. There is little danger that a teacher of *Materia Medica* will fail sufficiently to impress upon the student the importance of medicines; there may be some, that he will turn to his audience exclusively the bright side which he loves to contemplate himself, and neglect to put them upon their guard against the perils to which they are exposed. I shall endeavour to avoid this error; and, though unwilling to damp your ardour by instilling unnecessary or fanciful apprehensions, shall not shrink from the duty of pointing out dangers, whenever I may myself

be aware of their existence. Much that has relation to the misuse and abuse of medicines may be most advantageously reserved for the occasion when each medicine shall be individually considered; but I do not know that I can do better than avail myself of the present opportunity to offer some views of a general nature, which may possibly be found useful at the same time in guarding you against errors yourselves, and in enabling you to counteract, in some measure, the mischief resulting from the errors of others. In order to render the subject clearer and more impressive, I shall endeavour to arrange in a regular series the various sources of error in the employment of medicines, so far as I have been able to discover them, giving precedence to the least copious, and reserving for the close such as send forth their flood of evil most abundantly.

Physicians, even though well instructed, particularly those young in the profession, are apt to attach undue importance to the influence of medicines, not sufficiently considering the character of the pathological condition, nor how impossible it often is to effect salutary changes in this condition by other means than the slow operations of nature. Administering a remedy in some complaint in which it may appear to be indicated, and not finding a degree of amendment equal to their impatience, they are tempted either to increase the dose too rapidly, and thereby incur the risk of seriously complicating the disease, or to resort prematurely to other really less eligible means. They are, moreover, under the constant inducement to prescribe medicines, where patience and the careful avoidance of perturbing agencies are all that is necessary to the cure; and there can be no doubt, that the thread of life has been often snapped by the officious hand of the physician, rashly thrust into the vital process, which required only time for a favourable issue. I believe, however, that this fountain of evil is daily diminishing under the brighter light which multiplied observation is pouring upon the field of pathological medicine. The age of heroic doses, like that of heroic deeds, is retreating before the march of sound reason and common sense. It is chiefly in the outskirts of the profession that the attempt is now made to take disease by



storm. The number is comparatively few, who would choose to beat down defences by a shattering cannonade of calomel, which are ready to surrender on demand, or to yield uninjured to a gentle siege of starvation. Against the risk of a too frequent or too abundant recourse to medicines, there is no better safeguard than a diligent study of pathology in its present improved and improving condition; and this study I therefore urge upon you, with the caution, however, that you guard against its seductions, and remember that, though it is highly desirable to understand the nature of disease, it is still more so to be able to cure it.

A disposition to employ medicines too profusely may sometimes have its origin in another source. Over a large portion of our country, the physician supplies his patients with medicine as well as advice, and receives compensation for both. It thus becomes his interest, in a pecuniary point of view, to leave no opportunity for the insertion of a dose unimproved; and, though the great majority of practitioners are of a grade of morals above such an influence, it is yet not altogether unfelt, and probably, in many instances, operates insensibly in giving a bias to the judgment. In England, where much of the medical practice is in the hands of the apothecaries, who until recently were allowed to charge only for medicines, and could demand no compensation for advice, the influence of this principle of self-interest over the consumption of drugs has been enormous. Imagine a case of disease, such as frequently occurs, requiring only a watchful guard against injurious influences; represent to yourselves the practitioner making his daily visit, and each time retiring with the consciousness that his services must remain unrequited, unless he can find occasion for the employment of medicine; is it in human nature to resist the tendency of such a position? Even where conscience is firm, will not the judgment almost inevitably yield to the constant solicitation of interest? Will not the almost certain result be the discovery of latent indications for some pill or potion, which, by going down the throat of the patient, may allow a fee to enter the pocket of his attendant? I have understood that it was formerly no un-



common practice with the apothecary in England, when occasion was supposed to exist for some mild medicine, such, for example, as a dose of salts, to send it in half a dozen potions, to be taken at intervals, at the cost to the patient of one or two shillings for each dose. The system which led to such abuses was in the highest degree absurd, and, as I have been informed, has been so far modified as to allow the apothecary to make a charge for his advice; but the customs of prescribing to which it gave rise are still in existence; and the English continue to deserve the credit, which they have long enjoyed beyond all other nations of Europe, of being a drug consuming people. In consequence of this tendency to abuse, as well as for other very important reasons, it is highly desirable that the prescription and dispensing of medicines should be in different hands. In Philadelphia and some other of our larger towns, the separation has already been effected; and a movement towards the same result is observable in most parts of our country where the population is so distributed as to admit of it. I would strongly press on you the propriety of contributing your own efforts in forwarding this movement, when you shall have entered that practical career to which most of you are now looking forward.

If the physician, in early life, is in danger of overvaluing medicines, and consequently of prescribing them too profusely, he is no less in danger, as he grows older in practice, of restricting the number employed within too narrow limits. Disease often runs for a long time in particular channels, and requires particular courses of treatment. Medicines not calculated to answer the indications most frequently presented, are apt to escape the recollection of the practitioner, or leave but faint and ineffectual traces in his memory. He finds it irksome to maintain by constant study a knowledge which is but of occasional application. The heavy armour with which he was loaded in the outset becomes fatiguing in the progress of his march, and finding portions of it of no use upon ordinary occasions, he indolently throws them away, and thus leaves himself destitute of the requisite means of offence against disease presenting itself in new and unexpected forms. He acquires a routine habit of

prescribing certain medicines, which thus assume an undue prominence in his estimation, and present themselves on every occasion of emergency to the exclusion of others better adapted to the novel circumstances. A similar result frequently grows out of an indolent mental habit, which shuns on every occasion all labour of thought that is not absolutely essential. To consult, in the choice of medicines, the caprices of the palate or stomach, the prejudices of opinion, and the various contrarieties of a nervous or irritable temperament, though not unfrequently of great importance to the successful treatment of disease, requires an effort of memory and judgment which is too often avoided by practitioners not conscientiously alive to all the duties of their station. Numerous remedial substances, which may be considered as light troops to be employed in our skirmishes with disease, or as a reserve against sudden emergencies and peculiar danger, are thus entirely neglected, and become useless in the conflict. You will agree with me in the opinion, that he who wishes to qualify himself best for the practical duties of our profession, should sedulously guard against these sources of error. For this purpose, he should not only as a student form an intimate acquaintance with the *Materia Medica*, but afterwards, on entering into practice, should resolutely determine to maintain and improve this acquaintance by a frequent reference to works upon the subject, even when no immediate call may exist for the practical application of the knowledge thus acquired.

The influence of fashion and that of novelty are often felt in the use of medicines. A new remedy, or some new modification or application, or the simple revival of one before known, comes accidentally to the notice or suggests itself to the researches of an ardent practitioner, who is willing to believe what he hopes, and in his experimental investigations can see nothing but confirmation of his belief. The world soon receives the benefit of his observations, which a sense of duty may have brought forth, but which lose none of their attractiveness in passing through the nursing hands of self-interest and love of distinction. The journals glow with the rapture of a new discovery. Excitable

imagination catch the sparks which scintillate from their pages, and kindle into enthusiasm. The flame spreads rapidly, till at length even sluggish natures are warmed into action; and the whole profession turns from its accustomed course to luxuriate in the new hopes which are opened before it. The medicine thus brought into vogue receives the stamp of fashion, which continues to give it general currency, till some other novelty is struck off, and by its bright freshness puts to shame the tarnished and worn out attractions of its predecessor. Thus, in the practice of our profession, as in every thing else connected with the feelings and thoughts of men, one wave incessantly follows another; and the general welfare, instead of advancing smoothly upon an unruffled tide, is tossed about and retarded, and sometimes almost wrecked in the surges of unstable opinion. It becomes every practitioner to contribute all in his power towards a more equal and consistent progress. He should strengthen himself by the influence of judgment and discretion against the paroxysms of excitement to which we are all more or less exposed. Without absolutely rejecting every novelty which may float along the current of events, he should be careful not to endanger his balance by reaching out too far to seize it, and should never allow himself to be carried away by the flood of fashion from any well established and advantageous position. In this spirit, he should coolly examine the claims of alleged discoveries, trusting nothing to partial testimony, which in medicine is excessively deceptive, and having sifted out the truth by careful trial, should give it an appropriate place in his storehouse of practical knowledge, without allowing it to disturb unnecessarily the general arrangement, or to displace any important fact or principle from its due position.

More injurious than either of the preceding sources of mischief, is the influence of false theory upon the employment of medicines. Almost from her birth, *Materia Medica* has been the sport of hypothesis. Tossed about from one medical creed to another, and sometimes almost torn asunder by the struggles of opposing parties, she has survived to the present time, to be still exposed to buffetings on the one hand and injudicious fond-



ling on the other, from which all the efforts of sound judgment and common sense are requisite to save her unhurt. You may receive it as an indisputable truth, that any claim to your guidance in the use of medicines, founded upon an hypothesis assuming to be of universal or even general application, is wholly groundless and futile. The facts of our science are yet far too limited to enable us to form a general theory of medicine upon the only true foundation—that of strict induction. How is it possible for us to draw from our knowledge of the human system a doctrine explanatory of all its morbid actions, when we are almost wholly in the dark as to the nervous functions, and of the principle of life itself know scarcely more than its existence? We might as well attempt to form an accurate map of a country from our knowledge of a few of its prominent points, while ignorant alike of its boundaries and its interior. Yet so presumptuous is man, that he frequently undertakes the impossible task. With intellectual powers, which, in comparison with the object, are infinitely feeble, he strives to penetrate the secret counsels of Almighty wisdom. Like the giants of old, he heaps up his mountain upon mountain, and with audacious vanity hopes to seize upon heaven itself by violence. There is only one path to truth in science, and that is the straight but narrow and laborious path of observation and experience. It is true that false theories, if without practical bearing, may sometimes be useful as aids to the memory; but when they have relation to human life and happiness, they become engines of incalculable mischief. Systems of medicine, therefore, claiming to be universal in their scope, as they are necessarily false, must be of the most injurious practical influence, and, though often attractive to the inexperienced by their apparent beauty and labour-saving promises, should be discarded as sweetened poisons poured into the very fountain of life. It is a most grateful reflection, that the present tendency of the enlightened part of the profession is in an opposite direction. Medical men have at length begun to enter the Baconian path. It is now becoming the fashion to observe accurately and extensively, to collect facts abundantly, to sift these facts by a most rigid scrutiny, to

compare them with the greatest care, and to draw no inference which is not so hedged round by various defences as to be almost unassailable. Though this system has had numerous advocates, no one has done more towards rendering it popular, and bringing it into extensive practical operation, than Mons. Louis, of Paris, whose works are models of scientific exploration applied to medicine, and whose pupils, both in France and this country, inspired by a zeal little inferior to his own, are labouring successfully in the same great cause. At present, therefore, we have, as a profession, less to fear from false theory than at any former period.

It is true, that the Homœopathists or disciples of Hahnemann are said to be making considerable impression on the community, and some practitioners of that school are supposed to be reaping largely the fruits of public credulity; but the profession itself has not become contaminated, and none but a few of peculiarly excitable imaginations are ever likely to yield up their judgments to its monstrous absurdities. I feel that it is wholly unnecessary for me to guard you against a doctrine, which prescribes, for the cure of each particular disease, the medicine most closely imitative of the disease in its effects upon the system; and recognises the greatest curative efficiency in doses, no matter of what medicine, varying from the millionth to the decillionth of a grain. Luckily for the dupes of this imposture, the enormity of the first branch of the hypothesis is neutralized by the almost inconceivable folly of the second. Thus, upon the Homœopathic doctrine, you ought to cure apoplexy by a blow upon the head; but the blow must be of no greater force than the millionth part of the weight of a feather: in other words, you do not kill your patient, because the means you employ are wholly inert. The fact is, that Homœopathy is nothing more than a childish hallucination, which shakes its little fist at the giant of disease, and attributes the overthrow occasioned by the mighty hand of nature to its own Lilliputian blows. But, though it does little positive harm, it is the indirect cause of much evil by preventing positive good. It is desirable, therefore, that the community should be protected against its impositions; and it

becomes the duty of the physician to do what lies in his power to disabuse those who may have been captivated by its pretensions.

The only hold of Homœopathy upon public favour is its apparent success. You may uncover its absurdities to the understanding, and most persons of good sense will join with you in condemning it; but others will answer that they do not pretend to be capable of estimating medical theories, that they judge by the result, and that, in relation to the system in question, this is often favourable. Patients treated by the Homœopathsists get well; and sometimes they are asserted to have got well after the usual medical treatment had been fruitlessly exhausted. This is the strong hold of all irregular practice; and unless you can conquer it, argument and ridicule will equally fail to produce an impression on the minds of many, whose imagination and capacity of belief are stronger than their judgment. Indeed, the minds of some persons are so constituted as to find attractions in moral extravagance and absurdity; and, if they have the least apparent basis of fact to stand upon, will exhibit a faith equal to any possible emergency. In the absence, however, of even this slight footing, nothing short of insanity could withstand the assault of reason and ridicule combined; and Homœopathy must fall into immediate disgrace, if its claims to great practical success can be upset.

It would be folly to deny that patients recover in the hands of the Homœopathsists; and I believe that a much larger proportion recover than under the treatment of irregular practitioners in general. Nay, I will go further and admit, that a disciple of Hahnemann may be more successful than a very ignorant and unskilful physician, even though the latter may take rank in the regular corps. But what is the real cause of this apparent success? I have too good an opinion of your common sense to suppose, that you can for a moment be disposed to ascribe it to the infinitesimal doses administered to the patient. Can any one of you possibly believe, that the decillionth of a grain of any medicine kept in the shops, a portion far too minute to be visible to the naked eye, and which the most powerfully magnifying



microscope would be insufficient to detect, is capable of producing the slightest impression on the system! The truth is, that the success of the Homœopathists is almost exclusively negative. If their doses are too feeble to do good, they are equally incapable of doing harm, and the patient gets well in the natural progress of the complaint. The tendencies of the great majority of diseases are towards health; and if no disturbing cause be allowed to interfere, they will sooner or later terminate in recovery. This fact cannot be too strongly impressed upon medical men, nor upon the community at large. It is a common notion, that every complaint which ends favourably is cured by the means employed in its treatment. Physicians themselves often act as if they were under this impression, and, even when they know better, do not always take due pains to enlighten their patients on the subject. They are willing to reap the advantages of the credit ascribed to them, without duly considering, that by their acquiescence they are playing into the hands of irregular practitioners. If every case which gets well under the care of a physician is a cure, so is every case which terminates similarly in the management of a Homœopathist or a Thomsonian. Thus must the public reason; and as great efforts are made by every irregular aspirant to their favour to parade these cures before them, it is not at all surprising that they are frequently deceived, and yield their support where it is not deserved. Let people be taught the simple truth in relation to the natural progress of most diseases; let the physician always be satisfied with the amount of credit really due to him, and take care that nature is not defrauded of hers; and it is scarcely doubtful that the common sense of the community will be able to estimate irregular pretensions at their real value. They, like ourselves, will see in the supposed cures of the Homœopathist the real triumphs of nature, and in those of the more venturesome empiric, either the lucky blunders of ignorance, or the successful struggles of a good constitution alike against the disease and the medicine. Nor need we apprehend that they will not duly appreciate our own services. Though nature may cure most attacks of disease, yet there are many which are be-

yond her unassisted powers; and there are still more in which her efforts may be materially assisted, and the amount of suffering to the patient vastly diminished by judicious medical interference. Let us rid ourselves of all false pretensions; let it be seen that we stand on the firm foundation of common sense, that our time and efforts have been directed to the search of truth, and that, having no interest distinct from that of the community, we can have no object in deceiving them; and there can be no doubt that we shall be consulted in disease, whenever there is pain to be relieved or supposed danger to be averted.

But the apparent success of the Homœopathists is not ascribable, in all cases, to the natural progress of disease towards health. Much may also be attributed to the influence of new and strange processes upon the mind of the patient. In all purely nervous complaints, and in many others of a more complicated nature, the production of some profound impression on the feelings or imagination will often occasion a temporary if not a perfect cure. There is no difficulty in understanding this fact. The brain, which is the centre of all sensation, is also the seat of the intellect and passions. If the latter principles are excited into powerful action, the brain is necessarily affected; and we can easily conceive that it may be rendered incapable, by the new condition in which it is placed, of perceiving those derangements which before occasioned pain or gave rise to some irregular action. They who have suffered with toothach well know how often the pain entirely vanishes under the immediate expectation of the interference of the dentist. When the complaint is a mere functional derangement, a permanent cure may often be effected by a repetition of impressions producing a continued revulsion to the brain. Now, with the Homœopathists, as with others of the same group of practitioners, it is customary to employ measures calculated to make a strong impression on patients of an excitable temperament. Their close examination into the condition of every function and every organ; their numerous inquiries as to the past history, sentiments, passions, and habits of the patient; the commission, in many instances, of all

the information thus derived to paper, in order that it may be scrupulously examined; and then the solemn earnestness with which they advise the very careful smelling of an empty bottle, or prescribe one of their almost preternaturally small doses; all this excites and occupies the attention, calls the passions and imagination into play, and involves the mind in a kind of wondering awe, admirably calculated to revolutionize the condition of the nervous system. That real cures are sometimes thus effected, and temporary alleviations still more frequently, cannot be doubted; but means of a similar tendency have produced the same results in all times and countries; and Homœopathy, in this respect, may rank with the touch of a dead man's hand, the pow-wow of the Indian doctor, and the more refined charlatanry of animal magnetism.

Still another cause of the occasional triumphs of the Homœopathist is the remaining influence of previous regular treatment. The remedies employed before the commencement of his attendance sometimes continue their favourable operation, or begin to operate, after the patient has fallen into his hands; and the credit thus accrues to him which belongs properly to another. An instance has been related to me, in which a patient with amenorrhœa, who had been for some time under regular treatment without apparent advantage, resorted to the advice of a Homœopathist, and in less than twenty-four hours was gratified by a restoration of the suspended function; but the credit which the new attendant might have derived from this accident was prevented by an unfortunate declaration which he had made, on his first visit, that no good could be expected until the remedies of his predecessor should have been removed from the system, and that for two weeks at least his efforts would be directed to that end exclusively.

Upon all these points it is important that the public should be enlightened. Let them understand the true ground of those successes which are so diligently paraded before them, and their understandings, extricated from the web of false inference in which they had been entangled, will judge correctly of the relative value of pretensions to their approval and support. They



will recognise, in the elaborate preliminary examination of the Homœopathic physician, the mountain in labour, and in his infinitesimal doses, the ridiculous mouse. The whole system, which, viewed through the distorting medium of false assertion, seemed to be a real though mysterious and wonderful fabric, will to their unperverted vision appear what it actually is, the phantasm of an excited imagination, a mere intellectual illusion, better adapted to the sphere of a lunatic asylum than to the purposes of common life.

The last and most prolific source of the abuse of medicines is the ignorance of those who undertake to employ them. Even within the limits of what is usually considered the regular profession, there is unfortunately much presumptuous incompetence. The best informed physicians often have occasion to regret the inadequacy of their knowledge; how woful, then, must be the blunders of those who enter into the practice of medicine almost without preparation, who have merely gone through the initiatory forms requisite for admission into our ranks, with as little previous expenditure as possible of time and study. The number, however, of badly instructed or wholly uninstructed physicians in this country is an evil incident to its comparative youth, and is daily diminishing with its increasing age. The establishment of medical schools, at various remote points, has tended to elevate the standard of attainment, by bringing instruction within the reach of many who would otherwise have been content without it. The leaven of improvement has entered the profession, and will not cease to work till the whole mass is leavened. The time, I have little doubt, will come, when no one will undertake the practice of medicine without having availed himself of the advantages of the schools; and a degree will be as necessary a prerequisite in all parts of the country as it now is in our larger cities. The question will then be in medicine, as it must be in every thing connected with humanity, not between skill and utter incompetency, but between different degrees of knowledge; and the lowest grade will still be far above that of absolute ignorance.

But it is in quackery that the source of abuse of which we

are now speaking exhibits its most deleterious influence. This is an evil to which, in some one of its various forms, every nation, however well guarded by laws, is in a greater or less degree exposed; but in a country like ours, where liberty is almost riotous, and individual will is constantly pressing upon the public good, it is scarcely possible to fix restraints upon a practice which appeals so strongly to the hopes and fears of the ignorant multitude. As in our spiritual affairs, each claims the right of walking in his own path, his own interest only being concerned; so, in the care of our bodily health, we are unwilling to relinquish a similar privilege, even though, in the opinion of those best informed, our course may lead to destruction. Hence empiricism broods almost undisturbed, and her venomous offspring swarm in every corner of the land. It is not my intention to describe the various forms of her evil progeny. Even were the object worthy of the labour, time is not allowed me to enter into the disgusting detail; and I am entirely confident that not one of my auditors needs any warning to keep his own skirts clear from the contamination. The relation which every high principled medical man must bear to quackery is that of uncompromising hostility; and the considerations in regard to it which have the most interest for him are such as concern the defence of the public against its seductions. A few general observations on this point, which, if time permitted, might be greatly extended, will close the present lecture.

One of the most efficient means of successfully combating empiricism, is to elevate the standard of attainment in the medical profession. Where this is low, it is not easy for the public to distinguish between the pretensions of the regular and those of the irregular practitioner. Quackery triumphs when she sees herself reflected in the practice of physicians. Let the student leave no opportunity unimproved of qualifying himself for the discharge of his future duties; let the practitioner, so far from being content with the attainments of his youth, cherish studious habits, and aim at constantly increasing knowledge and skill; let all who have at heart the honour of the profession, encourage those only to enter it who are suitably gifted with talent and industry, and urge

upon these the importance of ample preparation; and we shall soon establish so strong a line of distinction between regular practice and empiricism, that the dullest eye will scarcely fail to recognise it, and the dullest intellect to perceive on which side of it will be the greatest security.

But above all other things, it is important that the physician should not in any way countenance quackery, or encourage it even in its least pretending forms. If, from facility of disposition, distrust of our own qualifications, interested views, or from any other cause, we afford the slightest opening for the insertion of its roots, it is sure to fix its parasitic growth upon us, and to flourish at our expense. Touch not, taste not, handle not—should be our motto in relation to this great evil. Is a secret remedy offered for our trial or approval?—we should firmly decline the insulting offer, and let it be clearly understood that we recognise no secrets in medicine. Does a patient ask our permission for the use of some nostrum whose character is unknown to us?—we should resolutely resist the solicitation, and yield up the case altogether rather than retreat from our position. It is not the mischief which might result in any particular instance that should influence us, so much as the danger of sanctioning a deleterious principle. Should we incautiously recognise the efficacy of some empirical remedy in a single case, our stamp will be immediately placed upon it, and, in spite of subsequent remonstrances, it will be made to pass current for whatever value its unprincipled circulator may find his interest in attaching to it. Should one of these nostrums be employed under our observation, and the patient recover in spite of it, the cure will be ascribed to the medicine, and serve as the foundation of its less innocent use in other cases of supposed analogous character. There is no end to the mischief which may thus grow out of an inconsiderate act on the part of an influential physician. But if prohibited from giving our sanction, in the remotest degree, to the empiricism of others, how careful should we be to keep our own hands clean! To put forth a secret remedy ourselves, or to permit our name to be attached to such a remedy, is to afford the strongest possible support of example to the



cause of quackery. There are other practices which, though not strictly empirical in themselves, have acquired a suspicious character from association, and should therefore be carefully eschewed by the physician. To bring our successes or supposed successes in every possible way before the public, to support our own doubtful statements by the auxiliary certificates of volunteer or recruited witnesses, to proclaim our superiority over our fellow practitioners in some branch of the healing art to which we wish to have it believed that we have devoted particular attention—these and other analogous modes of proceeding are so often put in practice by notorious quacks, that the physician who resorts to them cannot escape the imputation of countenancing these impostors, and must be content, while he aids their cause with the public, to take rank with them in the thoughts of his professional brethren.

It is not by openly attacking empiricism before the public, that we can hope to overthrow it. Our arguments make little impression, as they are supposed to proceed from interest; and the sympathies of the multitude are drawn to the party assaulted by the cry of persecution. The privilege of reply is, moreover, made available for the purpose of puffing; the attention of the public is roused by the controversy; and great numbers become familiar with the wonders of the panacea, who might otherwise have never heard of its existence. Besides, in disputes of this kind, the party which has most self-respect is usually in the most disadvantageous position; as they feel under restraints in relation to the truth of assertion and the proprieties of language which are scorned by their opponents. The profession scarcely commits a greater error in originally yielding countenance to empirical pretensions, than in subsequently assaulting these pretensions through the public press. The flame which might have expired without the first favouring breath, is increased into a conflagration by the blast intended to extinguish it. All that we can do with advantage is to bring occasionally before the public the adverse incidents in which empirical practice is exceedingly fruitful, and placing them in their true light, without

attempt at false colouring or exaggeration, to leave them to their legitimate operation upon the common sense of the community.

But the same caution is not necessary in our private communications. Every physician has a certain circle within which he moves, and in which his professional opinions, duly expressed, cannot but have considerable weight. As circles of this kind make up, in the aggregate, almost the whole community, it follows, that medical men, acting in unison, must have it in their power to produce a strong impression upon public sentiment in relation to all the concerns of health. Let us reason in the following manner with our friends and patients.—You will admit that in any common art, they only are to be trusted who have made this art the object of especial culture. You would not go to a painter for instruction in music, nor to a musician for your portrait. In what does the art of medicine, in this respect, differ from others? Who are most to be trusted, they who have endeavoured to make themselves acquainted by laborious study with all that has been learned in relation to disease and its treatment, or they whose only title to notice consists in their own assertions? Is not some knowledge of the human system, in its healthy state, requisite for those who attempt to remedy its derangements? and yet what empiric will you find impudent enough to claim an acquaintance with anatomy? If these men have the skill they profess to have, it must have come by inspiration. Are they usually such in their lives and characters as to render it probable that they would be selected as recipients of so high a favour? Empirical medicines are often proclaimed to be infallible, and especially in diseases commonly deemed incurable. How does it happen, that the stigma of incurability still adheres to these diseases, notwithstanding the facility of resort to the remedy afforded by the philanthropy of its discoverer? The very essence of quackery is the ascription to particular medicines of a sovereign power over particular maladies. Now, no disease is the same under all circumstances. It differs in its degree of violence, in its stages, in the constitution of the patient, in its complication with other affections; so that the medicine which may prove remedial at one time, may act as a poison

at another ; and substances possessed of any power whatever can never be empirically employed without risk of mischief. Besides, admitting for a moment the applicability of a particular medicine to the same disease under all circumstances, how is a correct decision to be obtained in relation to the disease itself? The most experienced physicians often find great difficulty in ascertaining the precise character of cases which come under their notice : will not a person wholly uninformed be almost sure to err, and thus to use the medicine even where it may not be intended? The aid of the regular practitioner cannot be sought for in forming the diagnosis, while the treatment is confided to the empiric. He knows too well what is due to himself, to the profession, and to the patient, to countenance in any way such vile impositions. It is true that quack remedies do not always destroy the patient ; but should they therefore obtain the credit of the cure? If I knock a sick man down with a club, and nature is still powerful enough to restore him, is the result ascribable to the blow? The medicine may even accidentally do good. So will any drug on the shelves of the apothecary, if employed in all cases of disease. If every man who is unwell should take a dose of calomel, benefit would result in some instances ; but is that a sufficient reason for the indiscriminate use of calomel? The cures, therefore, so abundantly paraded by the empiric, are false colours, stolen from nature or accident, and intended as lures to draw victims within his reach. The mischief which he does is left to the discovery of others, and is often concealed by the grave.

These considerations, and many others which will readily suggest themselves to the physician, may be urged upon the good sense of those with whom he is socially or professionally connected, and will not be thrown away. Under such a course of proceeding, systematically and generally pursued, quackery would soon find itself excluded from the respectable walks of life. To eradicate the evil entirely will never be in our power. Its affinity for ignorance and folly is too strong to be overcome by any available force ; and until human nature is regenerated, ignorance and folly will not become extinct.



I have thus endeavoured to conduct you through the round of abuses to which medicines are liable. There may be some which have escaped my attention, and much more might be said on many points which I have been compelled to touch upon but lightly. You have, however, heard enough to satisfy you of the importance of attending to the subject. My design has been to point out the means not only of properly regulating your own habits of prescription, but also of correcting, so far as the circumstances of the several cases will admit of correction, those numerous abuses on the part of irregular and empirical practitioners to which the public is exposed. In the Course which is about to commence, I shall have abundant opportunities of satisfying you, that medicines, properly employed, are of indispensable necessity to the best management of disease; and I apprehend, therefore, little danger, from the somewhat gloomy picture presented to you, of any permanently injurious impressions on your minds in relation to the value of the *Materia Medica*.